



# VINTAGE Saints & Sinners

## Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)

From the Spiritual Exercises: A Contemporary Reading by David L. Fleming, SJ

### **“Soul of Christ”: a prayer**

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.

May your body and blood be my food and drink. May your passion and death be my strength and life.

Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given. May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross.

Let me not run from the love which you offer, but hold me safe from the forces of evil.

On each of my dyings shed your light and love. Keep calling to me until that day comes.

When, with your saints, I may praise you forever. Amen.

*What do you notice about Ignatius’s “Soul of Christ” prayer? How do you feel as you pray his words? Which of his requests to God resonate with your own desires? Is there any phrase that feels strange or new to you? If you were adding a line or two to this prayer, what would you write?*

*Ignatius’s writings are all about doing/practicing. These really are “spiritual exercises”...so this next reading is best conducted as a spiritual reflection, read in a leisurely way with time for pauses, silence, contemplation, imagination. You may wish to read the entire text one time through, talk as a group about what you’re noticing: about Ignatius’s understanding of God, himself, the structure of his guided contemplation exercise. Notice that the “Take and Receive” prayer is repeated after each section.*

*Then go back and, as the leader, read the contemplation as the other members of the group relax, close their eyes if they wish, pray and bathe in the images and thoughts. When you come to the Give and Take refrain, you may read it as the leader or invite the group to read that with you. End with the Lord’s prayer.*

*You may want to play some nature sounds or soft music in the background. When you close the prayer, leave some silence—and the talk to one another about what you experienced. The reading handout has some online resources that are really rich; explore those beforehand so you can tell the group about them.*

### **Contemplation on the Love of God**

Preliminary Note: Before this exercise is presented, two observations should be made:

- (1) The first is that love ought to show itself in deeds over and above words;

- (2) The second is that love consists in a mutual sharing of goods. For example, a lover gives and shares with the beloved something of his personal gifts or some possession which he has or is able to give; so, too, the beloved shares with the lover. In this way, one who has knowledge shares it with one who does not, and this is true for honors, riches, and so on. In love, one always wants to give to the other.

PREPARATION: I take the usual time to place myself reverently in the presence of my Lord and my God, and beg that God will direct everything in my day more and more to his praise and service. At this time, I may find it especially helpful to imagine myself standing before God and all his saints who are praying for me.

GRACE: I beg for the gift of an intimate knowledge of all the sharing of goods which God does in his love for me. Filled with gratitude, I want to be empowered to respond just as totally in my love and service of him.

THE SETTING: There are four different focal points which present the subject matter for prayer:

#### 1. God's gifts to me.

God creates me out of love which desires nothing more a return of love on my part. So much more does God love me that even though I take myself away from God, God continues to be my Savior and Redeemer.

All my natural abilities and gifts, along with the gifts of Baptism and the Eucharist and the special graces lavished upon me are only so many signs of how much God our Lord share his life with me. My consolation: who I am by the grace of God!

*If I were to respond as a reasonable person, what could I give in return to such a Lover? Moved by love, I may want to express my own love-response in the following words:*

##### **TAKE AND RECEIVE**

**Take, Lord and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—**

**All that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it.**

**Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace.**

**That is enough for me.**

#### 2. God's gift of himself to me.

God not only gives gifts to me, but God literally gives himself to me. God is not only the Word in whom all things were created, but also the Word who becomes flesh and dwells with us. God gives himself to me so that his Body and Blood become the food and drink of my life. God pours out upon my his Spirit so that I can cry out "Abba". God loves me so much that I literally become a dwelling place or a temple of God—growing in an ever deepening realization of the image and likeness of God which remains the glory of the creation of man and woman.

*If I were to make only a reasonable response, what could I do? Moved by love, I may find that I can respond best in the words like the TAKE AND RECEIVE. (return to that prayer now)*

#### 3. God's labors for me.

God loves me so much that God enters into the very struggle of life. Like a potter with clay, like a mother in childbirth, or like a mighty force blowing life into dead bones, God labors to share his life and his love. His labors take him even to death on a cross in order to bring for the life of the Resurrection.

*Once more I question myself how I can make a response. Let me look again to the expression of the TAKE AND RECEIVE.*

#### 4. God as Giver and Gift.

God's love shines down upon me like the light rays from the sun, or God's love is poured forth lavishly like a fountain spilling forth its waters into an unending stream. Just as I see the sun in its rays and the fountain in its

waters, so God pours forth himself in all the gifts which he showers upon me. God's delight and God's joy is to be with the children of humanity—to be with me. God cannot do enough to speak out God's love for me—ever calling me to a fuller and better life.

*What can I respond to such a generous Giver? Let me consider once again the expression of the TAKE AND RECEIVE.*

I close the prayer with an Our Father.